



OFFICE OF RACIAL EQUITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

Marc Elrich
County Executive

Tiffany Ward
Director and Chief Equity Officer

MEMORANDUM

June 7, 2023

To: Jennifer Bryant, Director
Office of Management and Budget

From: Tiffany Ward, Director
Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice 

Re: Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-105
Digital Equity Grant Funding (\$6,771,332)

- I. **FINDING:** The Office of Racial Equity and Social Justice (ORESJ) finds that Supplemental Appropriations #23-105 *Digital Equity Grant Funding* is likely to advance racial equity and social justice in the County. This funding will target resources to households most burdened by the digital divide by increasing access to computers and connectivity. State and Federal funds will be used to fund services for low-income residents including computers, enrollment assistance for broadband subsidy programs, and broadband infrastructure.
- II. **BACKGROUND:** The purpose of Supplemental Appropriation #23-105 is to add funding for the Montgomery Connects digital equity program to deploy computers and increase broadband access for low-income households. The County recently received 35 grant awards totaling \$6,771,332 in State and Federal funds for five digital equity programs in the County.
1. Maryland Emergency Education Relief (MEER) Computers for Organizations provides funding for laptop computers for use by County departments and community organizations that support K-12 students and their families. (8 State Grants – \$1,345,377)
 2. MEER Computers for Students provides funding for Chromebook laptops for K-12 students in Montgomery County. (21 State Grants – \$4,009,755)

Racial Equity Impact Assessment (REIA) Supplemental Appropriation (SA) #23-105
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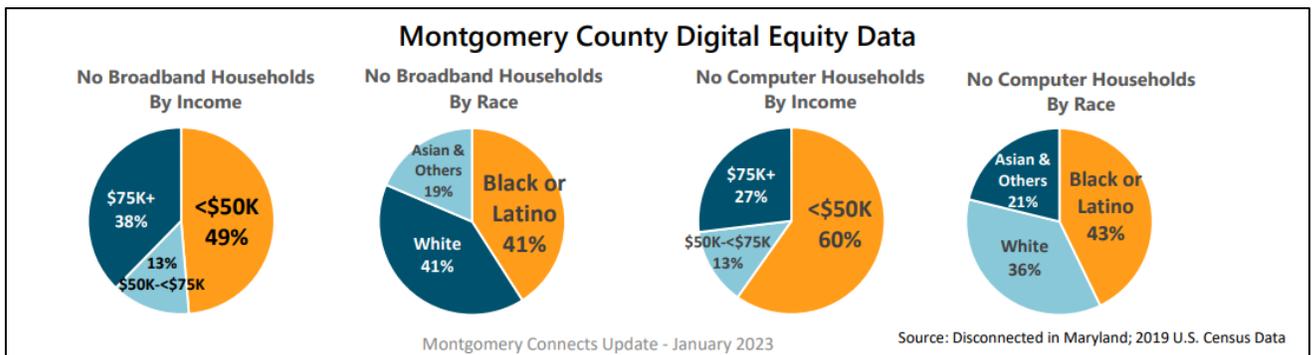
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3. MD-GAPS Broadband in Affordable Housing provides funding for four MoCoNet construction projects, which include Housing Opportunities Commission and Montgomery Housing Partnerships properties. (4 State Grants – \$961,000)
4. Connected Maryland Devices Computers for Affordable Connectivity Program (ACP) Households provides funding for 34,200 computers for one computer per address for low-income Montgomery County households who qualify for the ACP. (1 State Grant – \$205,200)
5. FCC ACP Navigator Pilot Program provides funding for ACP enrollment outreach for enrollees in SNAP and Pell Grant benefit programs, and on-site assistance at 110 affordable housing developments. This is 1 of 9 national pilot programs. (1 Federal Grant – \$250,000)

III. **ANALYSIS:** ORESJ has previously analyzed a program offered through Montgomery Connects, the County’s digital equity and inclusion program, in REIA #22-94, Montgomery Connects Computer Grant Funding. The supplemental funding was used to purchase 40,048 computers for distribution to low-income households through the Computer for You program. This REIA examined the funding’s ability to reduce opportunity and achievement gaps in education such as the Homework Gap. Our full analysis can be found at:

<https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/ore/Resources/Files/22-94.pdf>.

The following charts show the percentage of households with no broadband and no computer by income and race. Households earning less than \$50,000 are the majority of homes not having broadband or a computer. Black and Latino families make up the majority of households with no computer and are at the same level as Whites for not having broadband service in the household.



Source: Montgomery Connects Update, January 2023. Available at:

https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2023/20230216/20230216_ECON3.pdf

Technology & Enterprise Business Solutions (TEBS) provided updated information during the review of the FY24 Operating Budget request on progress made in reducing the digital

divide¹ and targeted programs and services. According to TEBS, “the metrics for success include reviewing federal and state data, and implementing whenever possible, additional means to track progress to provide devices, expand broadband access, and provide digital skills training to low-income residents, Black, Latino, and senior residents, and to identify additional support provided to immigrant communities, job seekers, and youth STEAM programs².”

TEBS computer distribution data shows that out of 50,000 computers, 81% were provided to families earning less than \$50,000 a year. Distribution data by race and ethnicity shows that 56% of computers were provided to Black, 19% to Latino, and 12% to Asian residents. Additionally, 65% of computers were distributed to Black and Latino households earning less than \$50,000 a year. Under the ACP Broadband Subsidy Program, 17,182 families enrolled in the \$45/month ACP broadband discount program, with direct enrollment support provided to 1,200 families. MoCoNet Residential Broadband is projected to be in 5 residential affordable housing communities.

In March 2023, the County Council adopted Bill 4-23E-Special Projects Manager, which created a central point for the coordination and oversight of digital equity initiatives. The Racial Equity and Social Justice Impact Statement (RESJIS)³ examined the digital divide and racial equity in the County. The RESJIS found that allocating a dedicated staff person for coordinating digital equity efforts in the County would likely not be enough to affect the digital divide by race and ethnicity. The RESJIS for Bill 4-23E also observed that the position could have a positive impact on racial equity and social justice (RESJ) if there were more funding for targeted programs and services and more RESJ focus on the responsibilities of the new staff person. TEBS FY23-24 Strategies will focus on expanding partnerships, implementing a media outreach campaign, and targeting on-site programs geographically⁴. Pursuing additional funding opportunities and centering RESJ, as these grants have done, is likely to advance racial equity and social justice for households and individuals most burdened by the digital divide.

cc: Gail Roper, Director, Technology & Enterprise Business Solutions
Ken Hartman, Director, Strategic Partnerships, Office of the County Executive

¹ The National Digital Inclusion Alliance defines the digital divide as the gap between those who have affordable access, skills, and support to effectively engage online and those who do not. As technology constantly evolves, the digital divide prevents equal participation and opportunity in all parts of life, disproportionately affecting people of color, Indigenous peoples, households with low incomes, people with disabilities, people in rural areas, and older adults.

² Torgas, C. FY24 Operating Budget for Technology and Enterprise Business Solutions, April 26, 2024. Available at: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2023/20230505/20230505_GO11.pdf.

³ REIS Bill 4-23- Special Projects Manager – Digital Equity. Available at: <https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/OLO/Resources/Files/resjis/2023/Bill4-23E.pdf>.

⁴ Montgomery Connects Update, January 2023. Available at: https://www.montgomerycountymd.gov/council/Resources/Files/agenda/cm/2023/20230216/20230216_ECON3.pdf